

# THE ZEE REVIEW

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# The Lee Review

Spring 2002

Presents

*Art Is Not Remote*



## THE LEE REVIEW POLICY

*The Lee Review wishes to acknowledge those who seek to glorify God with the gifts that He has provided them. To that end, we have diligently labored to produce a publication that we, the staff, students, and faculty of Lee University, can pride ourselves in. We regret that not everything submitted to the magazine can be published. We have, however, attempted to select those works which we find to best reflect this magazine's commitment to presenting through art the truth of an authentic Christian life, rife with heartache, questions, struggles, failures, victories, joy, happiness, answers, exuberance, lament, and fun. We ask that as you read through this anthology, you seek to understand the vast nature of God and the many ways He works among His beloved people.*

**SPECIAL THANKS TO:** *Dr. Conn, for all your support;  
Dr. Matthew Melton and the Department of  
Communication and the Arts, for use of the  
Publication Lab.*

## THE LEE REVIEW STAFF

Dr. Sarah Kane — Faculty Sponsor

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Rachel Land — Assistant Editor, Layout & Design

Elisabeth Schirmers — Cover Artist

Wesley Bidy — staff

Chuck Campbell — staff

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At the bottom of a steep place  
comprised of jagged, black rocks  
that gleam like tears on the mountain's face,  
there is a place where nothing lives  
and only the rocks are there to die,  
created by a lonely volcano  
with a lot on his mind.

Here lie the rocks  
no longer able to support those who fall  
and the gems  
that quit shining for no reason at all.

Every rock is his own tombstone,  
but none bear a name;  
dingy and dull,  
they all look the same.

The mountain smiles.  
He grins his obsidian grin.

The mountain is happy  
and pleased to be surrounded by the souls of his friends.

Here lie the rocks.  
Some rest in peace,  
but the rest are in pieces  
at the bottom of a steep place  
comprised of jagged, black rocks  
that gleam like tears on the mountain's face.

When trees weren't just brown anymore,  
the shrill twitterings of crickets at night and mockingbirds in  
the morning  
tapped their thin fingernails--lightly--  
on my window in Tennessee.

I sloshed bare feet through sick lime shag carpet,  
rubbed my swollen eyes with open, flat palms,  
and groped the banister, pulling myself up  
heavy stairs that crunched like Grandma's porch swing after  
rain.

In the kitchen, Momma made corn cakes,  
clumping slimy batter into a grease-snapping frying pan,  
and I lapped the salty-sweet smell with my sour tongue.  
After yawning wide and warm like a Basset in the sun,

I looked at Momma:

Her beetle-black hair came from her Iroquois grandfather.  
Her seashell bracelet came from Uncle Lloyd's trip to  
Mexico.

Her right arm's splotchy, strawberry jelly-colored circles  
came from quick, sneaky grease--she said.

I heard Daddy chopping wood outside.

He taught me that the secret to a clean blow is a strong  
grip.

So when Momma said she needed help stirring more batter,  
I wrapped my whole hand around the wooden spoon and  
made a tight fist.

We sat eating corn cakes at the table next to the window.  
I watched Momma's long, shiny hair and strawberry  
splotches.

We sat still and listened to the sounds of the morning:  
mockingbirds singing and Daddy chopping wood.

If I could shake this slumbering drug  
That binds me hard away from waking  
If I could bring these limbs to life and love and hope. . .

Once I knew what waking was  
Once perambulated as I would  
Once saw the sky with open eye

Once

Once the first full breath I took  
Bespoke the world like distant thunder  
like the waking of a god

Once my waking eye distilled  
The sight of you as all the most and best  
Of me

Once

But now I slumber  
At the razor edge of knowing  
The waking world just out of reach  
Where all is sight and life and breath  
The heavy lids will flutter open

To close again in sleep

## Epithalamium

Words: Sarah Kane

Tune: Beach Spring

Piano

1. Christ the Lord with fringht ful pow er seeks his Bride to fetch a way.  
2. Acts of love a - dorn the cham - ber of my soul till it is fit.

6

He will sweep the rug - ged moun - tains; leave un turned no sod of clay.  
Sac - ri fice of living splen - dor - death of flesh bears last - ing bliss.

11

Soon the groom from gold lit sum - mits leaves his throne for love of me.  
Lord, my Lord, I wait your com - ing. Lamp is trimmed and feet are shod.

16

Un - til then may all my ser - vice be a lamp for all to see.  
All my hope's in con - sum ma - tion. Un - til then, Love, be my guide.

After a day of hawking ripe melons  
in the village square, retire easily onto  
a soft bed of straw, lapse off into  
comfortable torpor, and awake  
to find the air thick with your old  
breath; try to sit up and find the lid  
screwed down and dirt thrown over.

Words don't quite escape you, but  
cursing mis-diagnosis and low comedy  
cannot help you avert the inevitable.  
Your bloody scratchings on the cover will  
not be noticed until later, when on midnight  
excursions, hunters dig you up to find the  
spoilage is not what they expected--  
the fingernailed troughs in the wood  
providing merely the convicting evidence  
of your vitality. You will perish anew,  
when they impale your moldy heart and  
pronounce an end to your roaming.

Peaceful once more, they will saunter  
back to their huts, not so good at analysis,  
but feeling safe again in their scholarship.

Alice bangs the door shut of her apartment, drops the bag of photographs on the floor next to the couch, and runs over to the open window. She leans out for a minute, feeling the skin of her face shrink at the cold, its fingers through her scalp, and watches the people passing four stories beneath her. They are toy people, mechanical dolls let loose from some shop; they pass with glazed eyes and heavy wooden feet. One has an overcoat that blows dramatically out behind him as if he were some kind of urban Superman. She lets herself think for a moment about the man on the plane.

The apartment has a musty, not-lived-in smell. Alice's perfume has faded while she has been away till it is the ghost of jasmine, only making the rooms more forlorn. There is dust in all manner of strange places one would never imagine dust could find its way to--the top edge of the bathroom mirror, an empty drawer of her desk she'd left open in the last-minute flurry to catch the plane out of O'Hare. In the two days she's been back, dusting has been the last thing on her mind.

Alice ran away to Florence a month before. While there, she reveled in her role of blond American tourist, unreasonably happy and fulfilled as she walked over the Ponte Vecchio and admired Michelangelo's David. She pointed her camera at anything remotely famous, returning with twenty rolls of film like slumbering caterpillars in their cocoons that she protected maternally from the X-ray machines at the airports.

The phone rings, but Alice absolutely ignores it, returning to the couch and sitting in a lotus position on the squat blue cushions until the braying dies away. Until her return to life tomorrow, she has promised herself a state of glorious limbo. Afternoon sun slides past the curtains and paints a



long, pollen-yellow stripe across her wide, high forehead to her shoulder--she is so rarely still. The long blond hair the Italian street vendors so enthusiastically praised slides down over her cheeks as she bends, stretching, down to the bag of developed photographs, and peremptory, she shoves it back behind her ears with both hands. Smoothly, the straight strands sink into, through, one another like liquid.

The hair is dyed. She feels vaguely guilty about this, as she does about a rich sensuality that crops up when she is not paying attention, vying with the school-girl primness of her name. This morning, for example, luxuriating in the ability to dress up wrinkle-free, feeling unreasonably sexy drawing nylons on, her thumbs sliding up the length of calf, up her thighs that will never, do what she may, become fashionably slim. There's Italian blood in her somewhere, a freak ancestor in a blank host of Anglo-Saxons, a dash of voluptuousness. Alice thinks with her body, talks with her hands--the Italian blood, again--and feels miserably self-conscious when someone remarks on the fact. She went to Catholic school.

Her Italian streak had flared up this morning, for example, picking up her photographs at the pharmacy a few blocks down the street. A man was there that had been on the flight back to the States. She'd noticed him slipping his carry-on from the overhead compartment half a dozen rows before her, a smooth gesture that reeked of experience and sophistication. It bore absolutely no resemblance to her performance with her overstuffed, unwieldy bags--the imprecations, threats, recriminations, and desperate prayers of a jealous coloratura. In the insanely cramped few minutes when *everybody* was trying to get their bags at once, possessed by that delayed knot of claustrophobia that hit their stomachs after the long flight, he seemed so calm. Older



than she was, with a quiet face, a civilized face, even a kind face, she thought, before hauling herself up short and giving herself a swift lecture about the complete lack of proof.

Standing in the impossibly long line to the register,--how complicated could picking up film get?--Alice saw him again, looking at the birthday cards. *What d'ya bet it's for his youngest of six?* Still in the dark coat she'd seen him wear on the airplane, he made an odd contrast to the pathetic pastels that screamed for attention on the racks. He had half a dozen cards in his hands that he shuffled in increasing exasperation. Looking surreptitiously up and down the aisle for employees, he caught Alice's eye, standing fascinated in the line, and grinned before stuffing all the cards behind a divider. A familiar smile--he was still making it, still looking at her. She felt herself smile, with a tilt of her chin acknowledging the look like one of Botticelli's Graces.

It occurred to Alice then that she had brought far more back from Italy than rolls of film and a leather jacket. She made a face she cursed herself for later and absorbed herself in the ingredients of her Snickers bar. They began to horrify her, so she hid it in the back of the AAA batteries and tried to look innocent at the register, as she tried to convince the clerk that yes, all twenty rolls of film were hers.

Halfway through her first roll, Alice forgets all about the man at the pharmacy. Some of her pictures are moderately presentable. All order is forgotten--the couch is coated in Florence by the fourth roll. She thinks she's taken too many shots of the David. He's in a pile by her knee, defiantly, extremely nude, in many close-ups. Alice digs a pillow out from under the Arno and the Uffizi Museum and stifles him.

The next roll is of the Duomo, and after the first few pictures Alice begins to wonder. She can't remember taking that shot of the sunglasses dealer on the front steps of the church. It came out rather well. They all did, she thinks as she flips through the glossy stack, but doesn't remember taking any of them. As a rule the pictures focus not so

much on the building but on the people around it, capturing the sheer mass and intricacy and state of the Duomo almost out of the corner of the photographer's eye--not herself, she reluctantly admits. A marvelous shot of a priest passing through the blurred crowd of the young, shouting Italians and hassled tourists. Pigeons in flight, silhouetted against the ascending lines of the building. A man hawking rosaries. Herself, long blond hair gleaming in the wind like a nimbus.

Her head was thrown back, looking at the height of Brunelleschi's dome, and the line of her body formed a taut curve as if she would take any minute to the clear sky. But there was something very sensual about the shot, the abandonment of her head and the long arc of her neck, her bare arms and how her skirt bunched in her hands braced against her lower back. Against the civilized, geometrical backdrop of the Duomo she rose like a naked flame.

Alice's smile is unmistakably Italian.

El beso es un regalo de Dios  
Que todos nosotros abrigamos  
Es un momento en el tiempo  
Que siempre recuerdas

El beso es un momento en la creación  
Cuando el tiempo ha parado  
Y todo el mundo  
Está a tus pies

Es un momento especial  
Que dos amantes comparten  
Un descanso en el tiempo  
Que no puedes recobrar

Es un momento de tiempo  
Cuando los pajaros cantan  
Y los animales miran  
A dos amantes enamorados

¿Que es el beso?  
Es un regalo de Dios  
Para tí y para mí  
Que es difícil olvidarlo

The rain lay limply upon the ground  
random in its collection.

The path flowing underfoot, paved in brick,  
wandered quietly behind me as I traversed onward.

Night, the ever quiet, solemn companion,  
strode confidently along side  
as my mind meandered thoughtlessly,  
attempting at intervals to contrive cohesive thought.

A free song keeps charging through my mind,  
like a crazed Pict,  
cutting a swath through my lost thoughts.

But it is not this moment.  
And it I will not sing.

For my companion Night bears solemnity upon his breast,  
and that is a state not to trifle with.  
I whisper a prayer of thanks into the mist,  
and traverse onward, the bricked path  
wearing the dull sheen of the wetted rain.

Driving down a dimly lit road  
with fog as thick as silence  
thoughts of emptiness fill my mind  
and I lost track of the road  
when suddenly  
the pavement before me heaved  
upward with great force  
and from the giant's gap  
sprang a mountainous tree  
it shot above the clouds  
its roots engulfed the earth  
and its branches reached out to devour me  
when suddenly  
they stopped  
my automobile sailed into the trunk  
and the shattering glass and splintering metal  
penetrated to the very heartwood  
of the looming creature  
I sat there stunned and mystically unharmed  
and I stood within the monster's crater  
and scraped together my wit  
begging for explanation to pass me by  
when suddenly  
the mayor and his entourage  
came upon me  
but somehow passed me by  
as if they noticed nothing  
and then a bus  
full of churchgoers  
stopped for a moment  
but only to look at a map  
to find their way  
and soon they, too, passed me by  
then showed the good Samaritan  
traveling on a lowly mule

but still even he passed me by  
my perplexity reached its peak  
when suddenly  
a motorcycle gang  
swept through me like a cyclone  
and yet I felt nothing  
for I was invisible transparent  
physically unnoticeable  
I yelled  
but no words escaped me  
I cried  
but no tears left my eyes  
which made me weep all the more  
when suddenly  
I began to laugh  
hysteria overtook me  
and the laughter  
echoed within my head  
and yet there was no sound  
then I saw a light  
off in the distance  
and reached out to touch it  
and I breathed in deeply  
to draw it still closer to me  
and then I feasted upon the light  
and blackness once again overtook me  
when suddenly  
in a dying rage  
the ominous tree  
lunged a branch at my heart  
"but a shaft of light shot from my [mouth]  
igniting the [branch] with fire"  
and I began to laugh  
as the tree began to burn  
then I looked

to see the fog leaving  
and I vomitted up the light  
the trees ashes  
scattered in the wind  
and the pavement  
reformed its perfection  
when suddenly  
I was driving down the road  
once again  
with thoughts of emptiness  
filling my mind  
and the wonders  
of reaching my destination  
so suddenly  
hit me  
like a giant tree  
in the middle of the road . . .







Even Jesus can't fix blind eyes  
when a girl don't have any.  
And that's just what waited  
in the woods: lotsa  
gnarled and low-hanging trees  
whose every arm ended in  
sharp twisted claws  
spread out like  
spider veins on grandma's legs--  
Daddy said so. Daddy said  
    No traipsing into the woods--  
    especially when spinning-headed  
    hoot owls are out cos  
    broomsticks and black hats  
    are surely close by.

(Who says fear doesn't motivate?)

But Daddy also said to  
    Mind Big Brother cos  
    brother's strong and  
    brother's safe,  
and what sleepy-head girl  
questions Daddy at 8  
and O God o'clock

I didn't want to go, I didn't.  
'Blind beggar' didn't seem to be  
a much sought after job skill,  
though Progressives and  
long-suffering Suffragettes would say  
it's all *à cause de*  
my environment.

Phallocentrism--  
excuse *par excellence*  
for all the stupid things girls do  
driven mad by a  
size-conscious society.  
Boys, too. Hansel,  
short, fat , and  
smaller-than-the-other-boys  
Hansel with herolust.  
Well-endowed with stupidity  
and beaming with bravado  
you led us into the woods.  
No princes--  
neither charming nor sincere--  
awaited to sweep me  
off my feet. That  
man in the moon  
must have drawn the draperies.  
Sleepy but alert,  
it was I who  
    whispered 'breadcrumbs,'  
I who gave you that  
    stick-for-a-finger,  
I who pushed  
    while you sat bawling.  
  
Aye, but you told the story.

*Hymn of the Bible Belt*

Impale me, Lord, on grace.  
A worm wriggling on a hook,  
Cast me to the sea.

*Day at the Office*

His mouth is made of  
Bread. Typing, typing, typing:  
He is so hungry.

*After the Break-In*

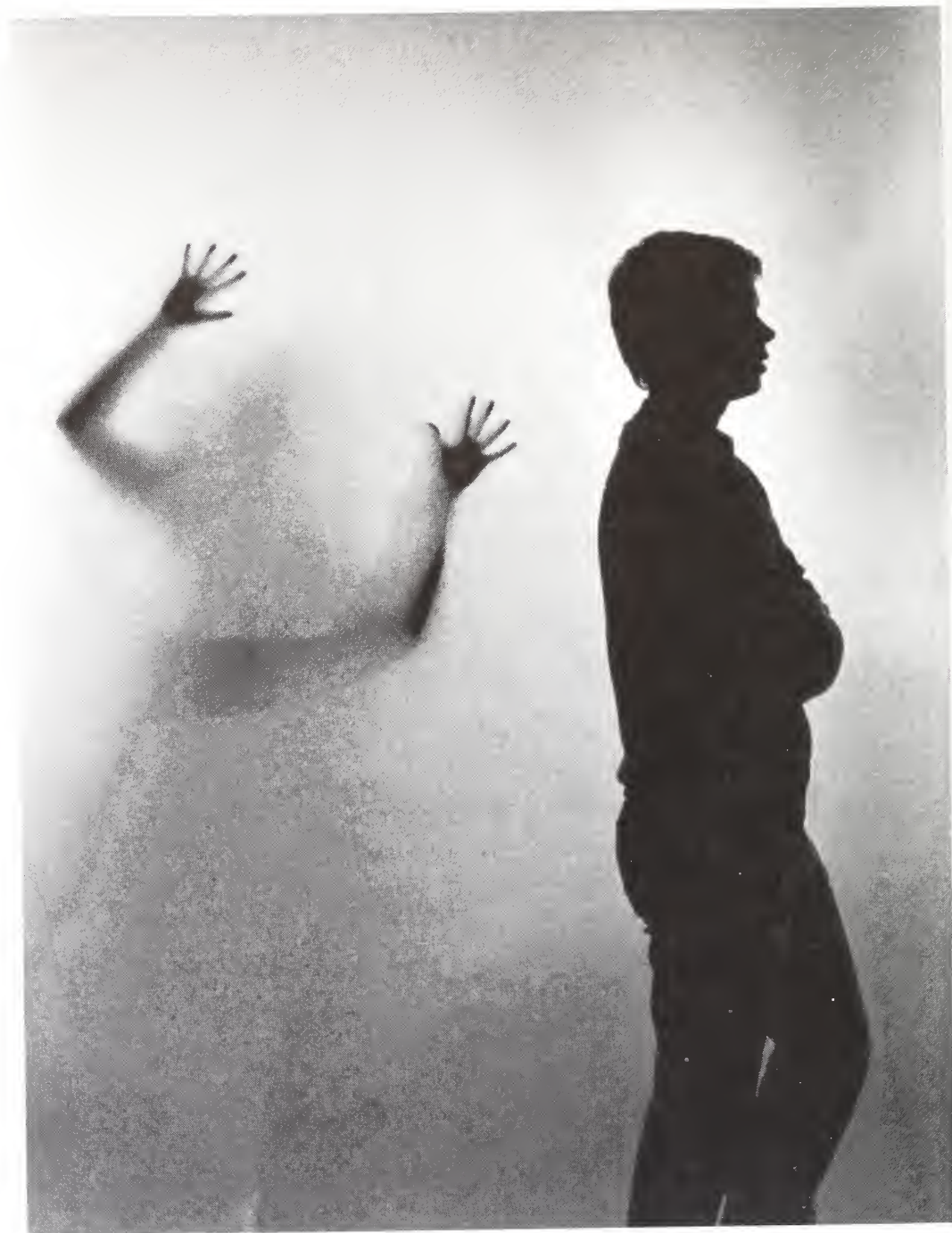
Strange--he took nothing . . .  
Moon escaped through mute windows;  
That pale thief mocks us.

One day, out riding late, I saw an archangel.  
I saw emblazoned in the clouds, out of the east, I saw  
Unfurled across the sky, rising against the reddening  
sun,  
The capstone of a dimmer host, the archangel  
With eager sword leaping from the mouth of God.  
I would open my eyes on apocalypse  
In the moist and tender morning, when every sparrow's  
A trumpet in the queasy silence of an empty house.  
I would go up and down the streets, a child-prophet  
seeking  
One righteous man with a crown of stars. Just to be  
sure.  
And for those split seconds--split infinities, really--  
Before my pale horse shied, the molten streets reverted  
To asphalt, and my mom brought in the groceries,  
With cleaving tongue and cloven soul  
I really believed.

To lose you would be to lose all roses.  
 This town of crippled idols,  
 where twilight's orphans come to retire from beauty,  
 banishes even your apparition,  
 and I, self-indulgent smuggler, am left  
 holding the blur, and my poetry.

But what is smudged is not blotted, and I hoard it,  
 scrape scraps of color from the long afternoon  
 that is your laugh and not night:  
 a dream of undulant pink, the horizons flooding--  
 Etta James's marble-cast "At Last" panting incarnate,  
 uncleft gem of flesh as tense as verbs--  
 smile, spell, and fathomless depth of clover-scent.

To sleep. To dream.  
 To dream to hand you my hands  
 and their fullness of blur--Aurora Borealis  
 in a crystal ball--your apparition and  
 my stash of unbanishable:  
 this treasure of hope and all roses.



She sat there crying silently into one slender palm  
Folded discreetly across her cheek  
Like one of those Venetian sculptures  
That always seems to be placed just right  
Under stained glass windows yawning upward  
Near sunset in silent museums.

Sounds of words and merely other sounds  
Unfolded in the air around her,  
Just so much paperless commentary  
From noisy tourists who don't have sense  
Enough to know a holy moment  
Nor enough sense to realize those tears  
Falling in their midst can sanctify  
The very indifference that profanes us all.

I'd like to think her tears were made for me alone,  
Not groped after by the wandering gazes  
Of my rumpled, fellow graduate students  
Between gulps of Dasani bottled water  
And the irreverent smacking of Wrigley's Spearmint  
gum  
In the 11 a.m. Modern Poetry Seminar.

So I found her after class and  
Invaded her personal space  
In a too-narrow corridor between  
Softly humming vending machines  
And pay phones whose metal corrugated cords  
Seemed perilously twisted round their necks.



Feeling foolish, I asked her what was wrong  
And confessed I'd seen her crying during class.  
She smiled and said it was a poem--  
A poem that made her cry--  
A poem we'd been reading during class.  
But the thing is, she never said *which* poem it was.

So now I'm sitting up for what is  
Going on thirty-seven hours straight  
Maddened by the thought, the glop of unknowing.  
Because we were reading Stevens--Wallace Stevens--  
That brilliant heartless huckster,  
Lump of imaginative coal pulsing  
Blue light and heat like some rosetta stone

Flailing at the air with words  
That no one ever really "gets."  
And if somebody says he or she does "get" Stevens  
You know you've met at least half a liar.

Two days now, re-reading Stevens  
With my box of Kleenex ready just in case,  
Looking, waiting in front of a new mirror  
So I won't miss it when it happens . . .



*(An ironic commentary on the follies of contemporary college poetry)*

Crackle pop buzz whir snap literary reference  
Fuzz snow grain bell ding French word  
Incorrect answer game show noise something about  
    Jesus  
Springboard boing bad-word historical figure.  
Don't you wish you were smart like me?

Another night falls, and I  
kneel to petition for the  
dented and the destroyed,  
the haughty and the humble,

though the gesture seems a  
relic, somehow similar to  
sacrificing virgins to  
appease a volcano.

Am I merely singing a  
soliloquy while the  
stars and the ceiling  
idly watch?

The host of heaven has  
gone on vacation for a  
season, while neighbors  
weaken and friends deteriorate.

Can I not even leave a  
message for the messiah,  
or is the call waiting  
out of order?

Those who do heal today  
die tomorrow, so why  
bother with my posturing, my  
pontificating, my piety?

Another night falls, and I  
take two minutes in the  
hope that I'll feel  
better in the morning.



Do not manipulate my love  
I am a sweet vision  
Imagine my beauty  
I would dazzle you.

Another cathedral, another gift shop  
Ancient glass, ancient stone---but no photography.  
My spirit chokes  
On the threat of stale holiness  
Shriveled under the self-worshipped sun  
Of vanity, demanding entertainment.  
"It's all meaningless. When can we shop?"  
We clutch our postcards and cry, "Been there!"  
As culture sells herself  
For an attention span barely worth  
zop in a dryer.

My lungs burn at the top of St. Paul's  
As I try to drink in the sublime  
And choke on shallow attempts at immortality  
Screaming, "I spent five minutes here once . . ."  
My eyes burn as I try to grasp  
More than my heart can understand.  
"Is that Paris in the distance?"  
I struggle---again---just to live in this moment,  
Without looking through the lens of a tourist.

God, you are too---well, amazing  
(for lack of a better word from a lazy mind)  
And I feel my thoughts slip away  
Over the Thames.  
What do you really grasp gazing up  
Into the dome of another well-built cathedral?  
The tradition and the silence . . .  
Maybe understanding will drift over me someday  
When I trade my schedule  
For a moment of tranquility.

In the dryers my wet clothes thump  
Like so many beating fists.  
Clods of fabric, layers of illusion.  
Each thump is a pulse in my throat  
Reminding me of you. I flee

Over the flooded, foaming river, into  
The raw day, the gnawing wind that  
Creaks the trees. My soul is tied  
To my body by a kite string; it is  
A seam giving way stitch by stitch.

In downtown Cambridge the shops  
Huddle close over the vine-streets.  
The colleges are wet clusters of grapes,  
Gothic-skinned, sweet and green inside.  
I blow through, a forked and naked soul.

Elf-children blink in the tempest,  
The academics with their four eyes  
And double vision. They careen by,  
Their umbrellas like dandelion seeds.  
Those are pearls that were my eyes---

You were my freedom, my sea-change.  
I am as frail, now, in this aching tempest  
As this glimmering, glass-blown city,  
And the wind blasts through me. Freed,  
I am anchored only by my sorrows.



Watching this one-act play from my window,  
I am Gyges, that king sprung from the pages of Herodotus  
who won his crown by voyeurism and regicide,  
packing his eyes with stolen glimpses  
of something royal, gorgeous, forbidden---  
an intrusion of a mortal upon the dance of sugar plum  
faeries---

it is a rape committed with the eyes.

The drama is acted out  
in the great and terrible gulf  
that separates Earth from Heaven,  
the moon's bloody scimitar protecting  
Eden from us, us from Eden.

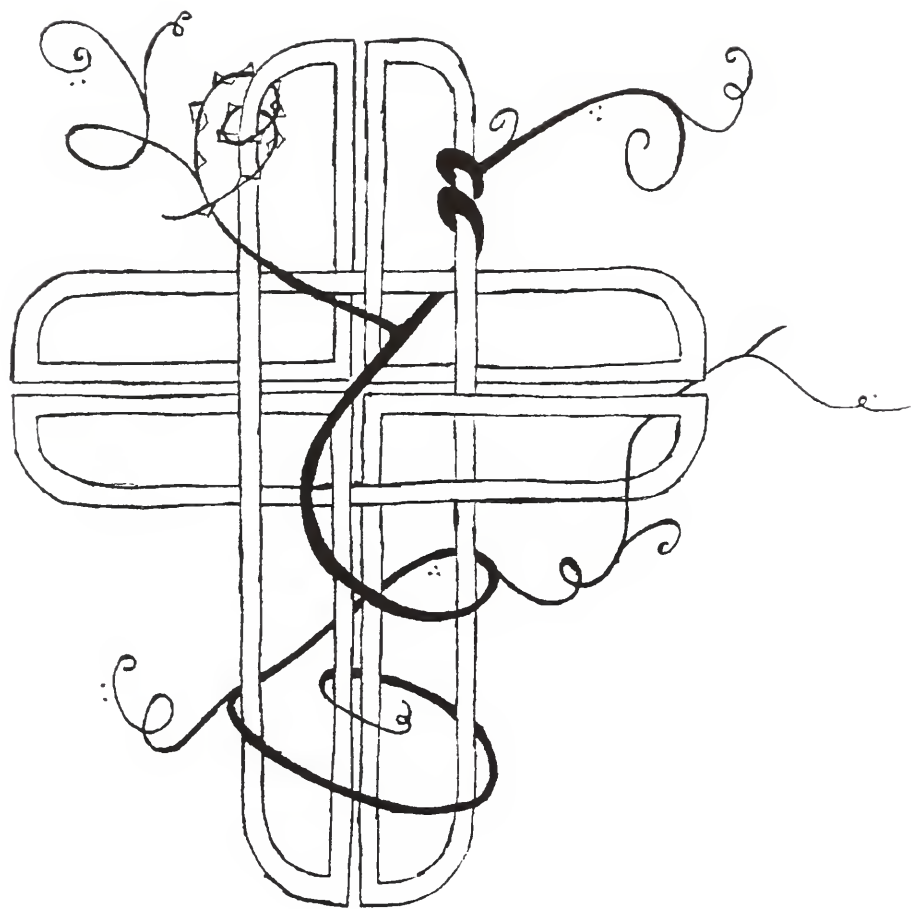
Actors clothed in the shaken fires  
of hiccupping stars from chorus lines  
to spell out an archer shooting at bears,  
spoons for dipping milk, caramel,  
a soup of crabs, and twin fish;  
they are cherubim putting out cigarettes  
on the Earth's charcoal ceiling.

The stars will belch and argue their operetta  
all night, until the dawn spits a spark  
into the sky's pool of diesel,  
the unsheathing of a knife that will  
cut out the fruit from the throats of nightingales  
and scrape away darkness from  
the yellow that perches on the lips of crocuses,  
the purple that lodges itself in their teeth.

Watching this crescendo, I realize that  
I do not want my name separate from the seafoam---  
I want to be born from it.

On the portion of unlit stage framed  
by my window, fireflies are trying  
to burn down the forest with flint and steel.  
Finally.  
Finally, I understand poetry.





Pulverize these rocks, kindred, and know gravel  
is stronger; fragments rejoice to hold dimension  
at bay. Strike them with your dead wood  
and they conquer, never yielding solutions  
of water, air, or fire. A curse upon them,  
yes, the same upon your lips. Speak nothing;  
only listen to the sound your chains make  
as you hobble past on inarticulate limbs,  
dragging faint lines through this clay.

Today, we wait; another time will make our escape  
real. Attaining only a few oblique associations,  
our minds slip to stone; grave, we return  
to dust, desire bent on caroling boulders and talkative trees.

things like shooting stars and meteor showers,  
summer meadows and springtime flowers.  
so much beauty put on display  
by one Kid's smiling disposition.

things like newborn deer and mountain streams,  
newfound love and picturesque dreams.  
so refreshing--this time, these moments,  
and upon reflection--profoundly fond of our condition.

one here, one there,  
but hearts true -- no matter where.  
a thousand miles to make the trip,  
but well worth it; the span causes even true hearts to  
closer-knit.

things like quiet captivation and cutting alterations,  
puddles of adjustments and pools of adaptations.  
so difficult, these times;  
the stage is set for things beyond (but needs more  
preparation) . . .

. . . things like shooting stars and meteor showers.

I have no longer rested my mind in the smoke-filled rooms of yesterday. Nor set my mind in the alleys and dismal barfly traps of muse. I wait for the golden-curved cherub to restore the broken halo in my eyes. Never will the patron saints of lost cause dwell in the cool, dry breezes of intoxication and body-highs of touch. The shadows of her frame sit on walls like lingering thoughts of lost youths and tired angels. Search parties of the mind trace the steps of her length then pass the clouds in fits of euphoria, just to find many others and me floating away into the night she had frozen.

What are the definitions of wall culture and door culture? Simply speaking, wall culture refers to Eastern culture, mainly Chinese culture, and door culture refers to Western culture, which America reflects. Also, "wall" means closed, and "door" represents openness.

The reason that I use the two definitions is rather interesting. I have been in the USA for more than half a year, and I am teaching the Chinese language and culture at Lee University. The apartment in which I live is on the corner of campus. In the first few days after my arrival, I often got lost off campus because I could not tell the difference between being on campus and off campus. I come from a place that is surrounded by walls everywhere. For instance, the most well-known wall is the Great Wall, which is considered our national wall; it was used to defend China from outside invaders. Every school or family has its walls, and some important counties and cities also have their walls. All of my experience has made me think that living on campus is living inside the wall, but here the campus has no walls. Not only is there no wall around the school, but there are not ones around the homes either.

Instead of walls, there are many doors in American buildings. I discovered this by seeing so many EXIT signs in buildings. EXIT signs are really necessary for the buildings because there are so many doors in a building. People need to know which doors are for entrance and exit. On the contrary, there are so few doors in a building in China. Most buildings only have one door. Some public buildings may have two doors, but usually one of them is locked. It is only used for carrying out rubbish and for bringing in goods. Some shopping centers might have more than two doors, but all of the doors are on the same side of the buildings: the front. Seldom are there back doors or side doors in a

shopping center as the shopping centers here have.

Due to their different cultural backgrounds, Easterners and Westerners have different ways of life, concepts of value, modes of thinking and ideologies. In China, Confucianism has directed people's thinking and has played a major role in defining the behavior of a civilized Chinese man for more than two thousand years. Its influence even spread to the rest of East Asia. I think the Chinese sense of modesty, obedience, kindness, hospitality, decorum, and all other qualities seem to tie to the teachings of Confucius.

Another great philosopher, Lao Tzu, who lived almost the same time as Confucius wrote down the five thousand character *Tao De Ching*, which became the origin of Chinese Taoism. Although he held different ideas from Confucius in a lot of respects, he did have some similarities to the teachings of Confucius about the way to live and act. Lao Tzu advised people to be peaceful, modest, humble, passive, reserved, not to show off, and not to contend with others. These ideas have the same meaning as Confucius' golden mean. He said that people should be kept ignorant, free from desires, and satisfied with a simple life in a small state without any contact with people of other states. This has made Chinese people closer, and they like to live in their own groups in their own ways and use their own dialects.

Also, thousands of years of feudal autocracy made people close and conservative. In ancient China, emperors and officials held strong power. They represented the law. People had to be very prudent and cautious. Another reason is related to self-opinionated philosophies of Chinese people. China had a brilliant civilization in history. The Chinese thought that their country was a big and powerful one. The word "China" actually means *middle of the world*. The nation's ethnocentrism also made Chinese culture

conservative and close. Of course, since the founding of the new China, great changes have taken place in all fields, but it is not easy to discard all of the feudalism and conservative thoughts. In this environment, how could people act so openly and communicate so freely?

In Western culture, people are more uninhibited and open. Due to geographical characteristics in ancient Europe, people mainly lived as hunters, and hunting is very difficult. The hard condition strengthened people's unity and association. In some countries, the industry and commerce were well-developed; other countries had very long coastlines, and marine trade flourished. These also accelerated the contact between people and associations between towns. The discovery of the American continent expanded their horizons, so they knew the world was very large, and they could not close themselves off. Geographically speaking, the USA adjoins the Pacific ocean in the west, and it connects the east with the Atlantic Ocean. This special position makes Americans have an open foresight, so the people have been affected by foreigners easily and are able to have more contact with foreign countries. Also, America is an immigrant country. This makes it easy to assimilate others' strong points. Because of the short history, people do not have much traditional scruples and pressures, and they have a more relaxed life. A more important thing is that since the Renaissance, westerners have advocated liberty, equality, and fraternity and have strived for technology and democracy. They made laws in order to guarantee human rights and weaken a ruler's power. All the people are equal in front of the law. People can have open conversation and communication. At the end of the 18th century, Americans longed for freedom and struggled for it. They finally got independence from British rulers. In this cultural background, of course, people like to seek their personal values and characteristics and pursue freedom and egalitarianism. Humanism and individualism prevail.



People who come from these two cultural backgrounds, of course, have developed totally different characteristics. Chinese people do their best to avoid hurting and embarrassing others. They tend to act indirectly and are more considerate. Afraid of damaging their reputations and living in a closed culture, they have more secrets than Westerners.

Chinese people think that modesty is a good virtue. Unlike westerners, who like to say "thank you" when being praised, Easterners usually give a negative answer to others' encouragements. However, Westerners like to express themselves very clearly and directly. People are more active, open, and confident than Easterners.

I think that changing a country's character is difficult. However, at the end of the 1970s, the Chinese people realized the importance of opening their doors to the world and began to do this. In the past two decades, China has achieved a remarkable accomplishment. With more and more development of trade, culture, and communication, the earth is becoming one global village. Any country and any person tends to be more open and active. China is the largest developing country, and America is the largest developed country; the two nations should have more understanding of each other's cultures. Thus, they can play more important roles in international affairs.

From nowhere,  
Black expanses, dark as the eye can see, in all directions,  
And I'm fine.

And with sound no onomatopoeia could fulfill,  
Bright, vivid colors explode in jacked-up concentric rings,  
As if a hive of irradiated fireflies was hit with a  
Rock from my hand.

Blue. Yellow. Red.

Beauty in the sky, and I have no by-my-side.

And in my black, content soul,

Concentric rings appear in colors of anger, sadness,  
Frustration;

My locusts scream not *Apollon* but *Loneliness*

The sky-lights brighten enough to see my lack of a  
Companion;

And the feelings inside of me brighten that fact,  
Octaves higher.

'Most beautiful.' And I'm alone . . .

Waiting for the fireworks to fade to darkness again.

Blessed are those who believe, yet do not see  
The misery of others, the squalor, the blight  
And do this in remembrance of me.

There are those who, for a price, sell their bodies,  
Filling their souls, as well as their eyes, with the night;  
Blessed are those who believe, yet do not see.

Working two, even three, jobs to provide for the family,  
Many are at their posts at the break of light  
And do this in remembrance of me.

While we gorge ourselves, others go hungry,  
Their bloated bodies beginning to give up the fight;  
Blessed are those who believe, yet do not see.

Others suffer from tainted blood, the scourge of HIV,  
And long for a touch, a caress, someone to hold them tight;  
Do this in remembrance of me.

Others' suffering and deaths are hidden; from the truth  
    most flee,  
Yet there are some who pierce through and seek the right;  
Blessed are those who believe, yet do not see  
And still do this in remembrance of me.

*(From Ruined 13th C. Castle)*

The grey walls of the castle around me  
Crouch crumbling,  
Mortar worn by rain and time and tourists,  
Worn like an old wool kilt,  
Stalactites dripping timelessly  
From its sand-blasted arches.  
The ceiling was likely first to fall,  
Rain grooving its girders  
Until it fell in under its own soggy weight,  
Like the overripeness of Rationalism.  
Hewn floor beams doubtless followed,  
Creaking and snapping and cracking  
Until the debris on them ran off like melted wax.  
The eight-foot-thick walls remain somewhat intact,  
Grey and rough and stained  
Like an exoskeleton  
Whose life seeped out centuries ago.  
Thirteen centuries, they tell me,  
The time of nobles and clans and penury  
When men were vassals,  
Women were wenches,  
And I'd have never had  
This sort of trouble from a girlfriend . . .  
The rusty iron bars that are here to stop anyone  
Who might MacBeth from their lofty parapets  
Also block my view of the sunset.  
The sea outside waits still,  
Still waiting to give up its dead,  
Uttering a murmur from water and shingle shaking hands.  
An unseen tide burrows hidden  
Under its sterling sheet.  
I see now why God's forgetfulness is a sea,  
His hope the dawn;  
The sun sinks for hours here;

Nothing gold can stay, but the sea of silver  
Will wait for me all night,  
Until the fishing boats  
Engrave its surface with their prows.  
The moon never leaves the sky here,  
Skulking in the sky  
Like a vanquished man eyeing his conqueror.  
The crags called mountains  
Have rolled over for the night,  
Exposing their soft blue undersides,  
At last safe from the sun.  
The lighthouse in the vague horizon  
Winks seductively at me,  
As though its heights and adjacent ruins  
Held for me delights untasted in this castle.  
The Romantics loved ruins enough to build them,  
But I doubt I have the heart to be a Neo-Romantic.  
Still stand the stones medieval,  
Lacking nothing that I can add to them.  
"I have a profound sense of time," I say,  
"But your meter doesn't," they respond,  
But I can count the pebble-painted  
Stone steps to the keep  
Where darkness is the all-in-all.  
The silver sea is lapping the sympathetic mountains  
Like a terrier,  
As though they could swim.  
Were there not more than one line of mountains,  
The ocean would climb right into the sky,  
To lap out the wary moon.  
My niche is drafty, my claim by proxy of  
Clan Buchanan alone,  
And the chill rolls in and retreats  
Like the Atlantic itself.

Other things have laid their claims  
On the mine that ought to be mine.  
I will pick and prick my way out of these shambles  
through sundry sentry brambles  
And down back into the city.







If this porch step  
could be a cliff in Nevada,  
I could come home from  
ten hours at Gas-n-Go  
with more determination.  
Instead of looking inside  
and watching the wheel  
on *The Price is Right*,  
I'd look outside  
and see a harvest moon --  
powder orange --  
the color of harsh cheekbones --  
spinning above tin tuna cans  
and my silver duct-taped Impala  
and the half-inflated kiddy pool  
we set out for Frankie and Ruby  
last July  
until all of those are crushed  
under its weight --  
heavy like a ballet studio.  
As I sit huddled,  
crouched and rocking  
on this splintering step,  
shaking like a nervous poodle,  
I think of the dry heat  
in Nevada.  
I think of Gila monsters  
and canyon echoes  
and wind scuffling sand  
between my bare toes.  
I think of my  
Showcase Showdown,  
announced by an aging  
Californian who still pays  
for an orange tan and sequined suit.

Signs that say "Pizza" and nothing more seem to be the norm in this place of longevity that demands no explanation--instinctively understood by all the yokels. If only what I feel was communicable--when I am in search of Rock City after deciding it definitely did not exist; when "bizarre" is definitely the only word capable of defining boring crossword-solvers who raise long, crooked fingers as I begin to "speak up now, ya hear ?"; when Greasy Creek is special among all the crazy places a car can find; when I used to resolve scares with arguments that it was all a dream, dreams that make me petrified at the possibility of opening the car door cos ghosts might be out there; when the guard rail abruptly ceases to be at the apex of the curve around the bend that awaits your straight shot over the edge with nothing below or above; when all the crap in the road is definitely going to slow this 3-hour tour of the Tennessee mountain road to Helen, where Oktoberfest, fall colors, and switchblades eagerly await our arrival.

"What road is this ?" is a question of utmost import when "that was your basic tree branch" describes the late-night traffic on the way to the Mystery Machine--"It is *fall*, after all."

Silence is but the breath that marks  
the realization of a new surprise, and  
30 miles per hour takes us no closer  
to our destination when fences are  
thrown up to block our procession.

Memorial signs demand of me, Why  
is kayaking Olympic ? Who would drive  
these roads to watch it ? Should urine  
glow ? Are there any decent shoulders  
on this fickle road of hairpins and  
bottlenecks ?

*Up and down, up and down,  
I will lead them up and down.  
I am feared in field and town.  
Goblin, lead them up and down.*

Ducktown. Oh One-Twenty-Nine, where  
are you ? Chevron and Exxon are  
color-coordinated and the motel  
clerk enacts a little trickery by  
moving the office inside the  
locked convenience store. Burra-Burra  
and North Potato Creeks, Jim's Pizza  
and Salad Soup, and a seedy El-Joe  
Lodge (is this some clever  
Spanish play-on-words ?) all call  
for one solution: Adrenaline Rush.

Dawn's early light is yet to think  
of stirring from slumber, but I  
saw someone's broad stripes and  
bright stars--lit by a couple of  
79-cent high-watt fluorescent bulbs  
that cost 3 cents per kilowatt  
hour. No rockets. No red glare. It kinda

cheapens the whole experience  
without bombs bursting in the black  
air--at least not in *this* forest--as  
we are welcomed to *North Carolina*,  
victims of that silly  
left-at-Albuquerque gag as we drive  
south into North Carolina and  
east into Georgia.

There's a convoluted logic somewhere in  
recognizing that God likes boys in  
wheelchairs because I like God and  
know this cos I Love my wife cos I  
Love God.

An industrial park and more, just passed  
mile marker 11, 129 cannot be  
found, and 64 is dotted with "Wrong  
Way"s facing our way at 3 in the  
morning in this middle-of-nowhere that  
could cease to be and nobody  
would be the wiser. Yes, *this* place  
is definitely synonymous with "silly."

King Kong's Zoo: one man's  
garage-full of southern junk, an  
in-his-spare-time attempt at  
becoming a Mayberry attraction on  
US19-129, though we are convinced  
it is really an excuse to display those  
human prisoners who disrespect the  
stars and bars and depart accordingly,  
assured that double-barrels are  
cocked, pointed at our necks.

*Christian* Plumbing, Mr. T's Storage--one  
free gold chain with every rental--next  
to Snoop Dawg's Rap Shack with Tuesday

nights the home of Krazy Korean  
Karaoke, all homogenized in *Union*  
County, Georgia. Well on our way.

The question at hand is how to convince  
myself today is a new day when I have  
not slept before breakfast at the all-too-  
disappointing Huddle Intellectually Void  
House just down the road from German  
enchantment somehow straddled within  
Appalachia, sweetened with Hansel and  
Gretel's candy, and Freemason belt  
buckles that are sure to be sold only  
to those who know the secret  
handshake and sacrificial rites--  
while the rest are methodically  
taken out back and . . .

    It all comes down to being  
American and not letting the  
Duct Tapes be the only saps  
who live life to its ridiculous  
human fullest--though it may be  
that the Tapes are a group of postmodern  
Korn-loving New Kids on the Block  
who pose a Minor Threat to South Central  
while drinking juice in their hood,  
imbibing a not-so-good Creed but  
singing 'N Sync (though still  
working to be N' Harmony). I am  
no more than the absurdity-recording  
piano player, Opus No. 3,  
Holdenesque italicizer, enchanted.

I'm sure I'll dream of you when I'm 80,  
Remembering the few days we were here.  
Memories clouded and shady,  
Yet I'll still remember having you near.

I'll yell at my grandkids when I'm 80.  
And swear that I had the chance to marry,  
The finest example of a lady,  
As cute as the rarest forest fairy.

I'll think of all our deep conversations,  
And how you loved me for that week or so,  
Of all your emotional evasions.  
You swore you were afraid and had to go.

Who remembers how much of it's true,  
but when I'm 80, I'll talk about you.

Physical affection  
is the art of misdirection,  
and the bliss of misconception  
in a way.

Like a serious infection  
avoiding all detection,  
it spreads to its perfection  
one could say.

Upon a closer inspection,  
regarding unconditional election  
and the natural selection,  
it's emotional protection  
for those who feel unwanted  
and unloved.



Rubber ducky kiosk in the mall. Debbie sits, working. Enter Alex.

Alex: I think it's important that we not deny our true feelings for each other.

Debbie: Would you like to buy a rubber ducky?

Alex: I've seen you working here, like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear. Let's get out of this dungeon of a mall and let me do something beautiful for you.

Deb: We have several shapes and sizes.

Alex: I know you probably have pretty high standards when it comes to guys. I can see you're high class. You're all poetry and I'm all prose, baby, but with the right inspiration I can do great things.

Deb: Unlike most rubber ducky distributors, we have a variety of colors, including blue and red . . . and of course traditional yellow.

Alex: Just imagine it--summers on the Riviera, winters . . . um, uh, wherever you like.

Deb: Also special edition purple.

Alex: And most of all, love, baby, love.

Deb: We're just out of green.

Alex: I admit I don't have much money but I can make up for it in passion.

Deb: We have a very popular model that quacks when you squeeze it.

Alex: My bounty is as boundless as the sea, my love as deep. The more I give to thee the more I have, for both are infinite.

Deb: Of course, our most popular version is and always has been the classic original.

Alex: I think it would be best if we just avoided the whole marriage issue altogether. It raises too many complications: in-laws, the marriage tax, kids . . .

Deb: Last year over three billion rubber duckies were produced and sold in the United States alone.

Alex: Sharing income and household responsibilities . . .

Deb: Sesame Street's Bert and Ernie really revolutionized the rubber ducky industry.

Alex: I think it would really be best if we just agreed at the start not to consider it. But, I'm willing to compromise, baby, you know . . .

Deb: Billions of duckies being sold never would have been possible without Ernie's bathtub rubber ducky anthem.

Alex: I mean, if you really want a family, I'm willing to talk about it, you know? I guess that I could come around to marriage and kids and stuff, in time, of course. I mean, okay, you know, we can talk about it.

Deb: (sings) "Rubber ducky, you're the one . . .

Alex: So, okay, we'll start with dinner, alright?

Deb: (continues singing) "You make bathtime so much fun  
...

Alex: The mall closes at uh, nine, so that's when you get off,  
right?

Deb: (sings) "Rubber ducky I'm awfully fond of you!" (Deb  
continues humming tune rather loudly)

Alex: Okay, so I'll pick you up at like, nine-fifteen.

Deb: La la la la la la, etc.

Alex: Okay, great, I'll see you then. (Pause) I, I love you.

Deb: (singing) "I'm awfully fond of you!"

THE END

Blue dot spaced upon the open wall  
Air as clear as glass  
White cords pushing beats that fall  
As if they could have mass

I felt you in the calming spray  
These droplets have a glow  
White on white, no contrast day  
bright lights, the New York show

Touch this clean, it's almost sterile  
A photo within the bright  
Pastel palette, no clashing peril  
Complete perfects my sight

Plastic goggles wrapped tightly square  
Pleased by this blue tint  
Faces with words beyond them there  
Bright eyes appraised as mint

(a "poem" composed by random people passing by the Lee Review's booth at Homecoming)

this frantic light a shadow moment  
vision is vehemence  
for whispering drunkards.  
Saucy peasants forswear  
this warranting a mother's torment.  
Alas, a delirious woman,  
bitter with discontent,  
screaming that would mischance have hence  
in some loathsome, delicate black forest  
manipulate her dire stare.  
Seemly sordid, like a wanton cry,  
it boils, beneath thee; sea of death o'er head.  
Behind thy girl rose a goblet fast and languid  
quenching only beauty there.

Dreaming that the meaning of life can be found  
somewhere on a pay stub and drifting to sleep  
while the world turns on its side and jolts  
forward into motion

These people are forgotten and misunderstood  
by those that wear the faces that color the  
histories of the world

For those of us that knew that there was nothing but a  
paycheck to be found, Kudos to you

For those who grew up watching Nickelodeon  
and sci-fi programming and believed in real life  
anyway; you wear a mask

For those of us that read On the Road and could  
not let their feet stand still but knew that it wouldn't  
change the world

For those of us who heard rap music and did not take up  
arms, and for those of us who grew up in the suburbs and  
realized that they had no identity and did not hang  
themselves for it, or accept a fake one, because it took  
too much energy, and who didn't mind having  
walls with posters of bad pop artists

For those of us who could not seem to segregate  
themselves and did not think that television  
programming had control over their actions

For those of us who sleep clutching a pillow  
simply out of habit and nothing more

For those of us who stand back while the rebellions  
take place, not because we don't desire change,  
but because we are awaiting death for it

For those of us who very well may cause the world  
to turn but do not know it and do not pervert  
its histories with made up stories and circus acts

For those of us who saw that people of the world  
with grim faces of war were tearing it apart,  
but got married anyway

Who went to clubs and found it more comforting  
to sit and get drunk on coffee after hours but  
did not think that this would change the world

For those of us who looked at art and saw just art  
even for those of us who think this is poetry

The forgotten ill-gotten children of history we will be,  
destined to join the ranks of sober naked faces  
that stare into junk-filled notebooks and  
know that it's junk



Never tennis before sunset before now.  
 An hour of cajoling, and finally my wife agreed,  
 Stepping into the clutches of a scorching June  
 Evocative of her native South Africa. She's cringing  
 Inwardly, against a backdrop of love's latest altar:  
 White lines on green asphalt ordering the moment.  
 Naïve husband of sixteen weeks,  
 "She knows the value of practice," I thought.

One can of new balls, one can  
 Of well-worn spongy things  
 With all but a ghosting of stencil battered away,  
 A defunct label, not sanctioned, just suggesting  
 Kiwis matted with that solemn, muddy fur,  
 Sloughing through dizzying heat.  
 Then a new ball whizzing past, over-ripened mango  
 With a stark black label hurtling terrifyingly forward.  
 She strokes a backhand, half-stumbling  
 Over twenty years of apartheid  
 Blazoned, searing, hateful labels  
 Like water on black rock, sheeted and acute.  
 Her star-spangled sweatsuit lies rumpled  
 Near the fence like an exhausted, sulking flag.  
 Too hot today even for patriotism  
 Though that took some convincing, too.

"Look at me," she says. "I'm black. I hope you're happy."

I think fleetingly of my own Indian blood,  
Quarter of a quarter Cherokee,  
Fierce pull of blood like Faulkner's Sarty,  
But not the same I know. Not even close.

After all of the allusions and misreadings  
There would still be the angry neon battered between us,  
The seething, muted green, the unrelenting heat,  
And my necessary angel, her skin growing darker  
In a land, like hers, too obsessed with color.  
She's cringing with every sweaty shot,  
And I realize she's letting me win.

Tú llevabas el otoño como un vestido—  
colores cambiando como “no,”  
hojas cayendo como “sí”  
(sí solamente. . .).

Un bosque de memorias:  
los árboles sacuden sus fantasmas al viento,  
angeles encapuchados que marchan hacia mí  
esgrimiendo sus espadas (sus canciones)—  
el día que te fuiste,  
aún la Vía Láctea estaba enlutada.

Las líneas de mis manos te recuerdan:  
el pelo como una ola de pétalos,  
la piel empapada con el aroma de la madre selva,  
senos que podrían alabear las estrellas—  
tu voz podría incendiar el cielo,  
tú y tu música salpicando el crepúsculo.

Mientras la luz en el bosque empieza a decaer,  
sangro los árboles,  
saboreo la savia—  
la sangre afilada y amarga.

Mientras mi luz empezará a decaer,  
yo volveré a este bosque  
para dormir debajo de las ramas,  
para imaginar las cartas que no escribiré,  
para soñar con un vestido  
que no cambia sus colores  
y está lleno de más que mis palabras.

You wore the autumn like a dress—  
colors changing like “no,”  
leaves falling like “yes”  
(if only. . .).

A forest of memories:  
the trees shake their ghosts in the wind,  
hooded angels that march toward me  
wielding their swords (their songs)—  
the day you left,  
even the Milky Way was dressed for mourning.

The lines of my hands remember you:  
hair like a wave of petals,  
skin drenched with the scent of honeysuckle,  
breasts that could warp the stars—  
your voice could burn down the sky,  
you and your music splattering twilight.

As the light in the forest begins to dwindle,  
I tap the trees,  
savor their sap—  
sharp and bitter blood.

As my light begins to dwindle,  
I will return to this forest  
to sleep beneath the branches,  
to imagine the letters I will not write,  
to dream of a dress  
that does not change its colors  
and is full of more than my words.

He's real like steel on skin, like paper between fingers,  
The lost vibrancy of trees flowing through capillaries  
    crushed into pulp  
And made alive again by the poetry running across its life-  
    mocking warmth.  
He's real like Prometheus bringing fire to life and being  
    punished by servants of insane gods, passion always,  
    always burning.  
He's abandoned blue jeans cut open and cast aside,  
Wing-tips too appropriately stolen by Morlocks on  
    mountainside  
And replaced by grotesque basketball sneakers  
Crying with embered tongues "Glamis hath murdered sleep,  
    Glamis shall sleep no more!"  
Poetry scattered among leaves crushed underfoot by  
    marvelous bipeds who've never known the sensation  
    of rolling  
Of sliding like mercury out of shattered thermometers  
Of rising like Phoenix from Holocaust ashes of Chevrolet  
    tombs  
The funeral dirges put on hold and the Burial of the Dead  
    swiped aside for  
Real like tree bark scratching tender cheek  
Lips dried and chapped, cracking where ocean roses kisses  
    swam like tides before.  
He's real like stone gods crying in night because it's the only  
    power they have left  
And choking sobs are only for the quick, not for the tortured  
    mossy living dead.  
Real like oxygen like death like life like resurrection singing  
    cherubim with blazing swords barring Eden  
Like sweat on brow backs muscles sinews aching (and not)  
    when things ought to be different and maybe one  
    day will be again

Like eternal promise broken by Fathers too wise to play  
with children, who scramble to glue with blood and  
grease broken dishes  
Before the drunken kings return with scepter and gavel and  
keys to life forgotten spent and wasted  
In wind and song and Autumn crispness softened with skin  
on skin.  
Real like tears spilled on crouching bathroom tile floors  
among relics of disaster and commonplace,  
The holy and cold symbols of eternal Lent cheated and  
whored  
And redemption found among earth and hands and longing  
eyes across courtyard chasms  
Real like leaving like emptiness filled with raspy void and  
draft  
And eternal, holy song singing always through night and  
making the stars to dance,  
Always making the stars to dance, cosmic ballet of God  
dependent entire on his eyes which are always so  
much more blue than mine.

Right now I'm sitting on the sidewalk in my ratty jeans and tank top, guarding my flip-flops with my life. I'm leaning against a cement wall, cross-legged and barefoot, between my guitar case and my pack, and I'm just watching the tourists watch me. I feel almost like the guy who got beat up in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Everyone is looking at me with either contempt or pity. I only hope that I don't start pitying myself, or hating myself for that matter. I'm way too young for that stuff.

But I'm not too young for a nice cappuccino. So I open my guitar case and pull out my most prized, not to mention valuable, possession. I may as well take advantage of those looks of pity. I'm playing the role of the starving artist or the homeless vagabond, whichever is more socially comfortable for a middleclass tourist. I leave the case open beside me and tune my guitar. If I'm lucky, I'll get not only a cappuccino, but maybe a can of spaghetti-o's out of this brilliant performance. I don't have to beg for spare change or an extra dollar. I'm fairly clean, aside from my grubby jeans. I can just sit and look pathetic and hungry, and people will drop something in the case.

I've just arrived in Hollywood, see, and this is a life by choice, not by circumstance. I moved to Chicago after I graduated to be near a slew of publishers, but that didn't seem to work out. So I moved to New York and gave the Big Apple a try, but again, I lost out. I packed my bag and traveled all the way to Hollywood. I figured, if I'm going to be poor and occasionally on the streets, I may as well be where there's warmth and sunshine. So there was my choice. Sometimes I hiked; sometimes I flew; but mainly I car-pooled. I always wanted to take a road trip out West. And here I am.

I don't quite know what to do now. I suppose I'll set up



residency, but that'll take some time. In the meantime, maybe I'll start my song instead of just sitting here staring across the street at the dog peeing on that tree. I pretend that I'm famous and ask the people what they want to hear. They say play something-or-other from my first album, so I burst into song with an oldie but a goodie. I check to make sure my flip-flops haven't been lifted and glance over at the case beside me; I'm \$1.65 richer.

I figure a good cappuccino may cost me about \$4.50, unless I can flirt with the waiter or simply look so desperate that he'll treat me. So I keep playing, and I keep watching the people walk by. As I sing, I wonder about their lives. I wonder if they are living by choice and if they're happy. From their point of view things may look down for me, but I'm loving life. I get to travel and meet interesting people, and I don't have to answer to an over-bearing boss. I get to learn new things and hear new ideas, and I get to write my story and play my song.

I dream of making it big, of being somebody, of getting recognized. Then I dream of just making it at all, of being me, of being obscure. I dream about that cappuccino and can of spaghetti-o's and a semi-performance on the strip, and suddenly I'm \$2.13 richer. I keep playing to nobody but me, a concert for one.

I love hearing people walk, so I stop playing for a minute and close my eyes to catch the rhythm. I imagine the person that goes with each pattern of steps, but I don't peek for fear I'm wrong. I listen and hear them plod along the beaten path, the zip-zip-zip as their pant legs swoosh. Heel-toe, heel-toe and that one's gone. I lean my head back against the wall and smell the exhaust and sunshine and cement.

I take a deep, satisfying breath. Someone put on way too

much perfume this morning, and I open my eyes just in time to sneeze. I wipe my hand on my dirty jeans, the magic of the moment broken. I slip my sandals onto my black-bottomed feet and play another one for the guy in the back of the room. Another pitying person pauses long enough to reach into their pocket to drop \$.44 and two breath-mints into my guitar case. I don't think he meant to give me the mints. But I don't say anything in case I don't have enough cash for the spaghetti-o's. I'll simply think of it as an act of charity. I'm not afraid to accept charity. Not one bit. That's how I've managed to make it this far.

I hold my guitar and look around me. Left, Right, Left, just like crossing the street. My block is empty momentarily, and I enjoy my intermission. I lay my guitar across my legs and arch my back to stretch. I roll my wrists and crack my knuckles. I want to sit and watch people for a while, but first I count my loot. I'm up to \$5.12, and the afternoon is young, and so am I.

I lean my guitar against the building and stand up. My legs feel numb and start to tingle. I stretch them and crack my back. I step in front of my pack and shove my hands in my pockets. I take another deep breath and lean back against the wall, rubbing my back against the surface like a bear. I stand straight again, do a full-body stretch, and yawn. My block is becoming busy again, and I don't want to miss a prime concert opportunity. This is a great way to cure stage fright. Well, I hope so anyway. I've never actually been on a stage except one pretty bad experience. I was reading poetry, and nobody much liked my stuff. But I've never played on stage. Yet. I'm hoping to line up some gigs while I'm here, but there's no real rush. After all, I just got here, and I'm busy sight seeing.

I turn my pack into a short bench, hoping that my lower body won't go numb this time. I pull my case closer to me and pick up my guitar. I look around for some sign that somebody's paying attention. They're not, so I start playing.

This time I do one of my favorites. I sing under my breath, and let the music do most of the talking. A few people gather in front of me, and I continue to play, checking my flip flops and grubby jeans to make sure I look clean but needy. Maybe it's my music, or maybe my stunning good looks, or maybe something called compassion, but those few people each drop a couple dollars in my case. I know I'm set. For tonight anyway. I can pack up and go get my cappuccino and my can of spaghetti-o's. I won't even have to flirt with the waiter, but I might anyway. I never know what tomorrow's going to be like, but I'm not worried.

As for today, this has been such a great show, and I don't recall a better audience. In my dream I thank the academy and my parents and everyone else who believed in me and made this moment possible. I'd take everyone out, but I've only got \$17.33.

I lean over and collect the money. I stick it in my pocket and lay my prize possession back in its case. I flip the lock and stand up. I crack my ankles, slide my feet into my sandals and put on my pack. I bend down, grab my guitar case, look Left, Right, Left and ease into the moving traffic on the sidewalk.

I move with the crowd for a few blocks, just enjoying being on my feet. I listen to people walk, and I listen to their conversation. Down the street I hear a sweet saxophone playing near one of the corner stores. I jerk out of line and see a fellow wanderer. I stand and listen for a few minutes and notice that his cap is nearly empty. I think about my \$17.33, and I realize that all I really wanted tonight was a cappuccino and a can of spaghetti-o's. I figure that's probably all he wants, too. I reach into my pocket and pull out several crinkled old dollar bills and a breath-mint and drop them into his hat. I nod and walk away. Tomorrow will be a good day.

*(An occasional poem written upon my visit to the Knoxville Museum of Art with Hannah to see the Tibetan monks.)*

If your timing is just right,  
you can catch mosquitoes  
and see Tibetan monks in Knoxville.  
You can learn how to make  
a gesture of explanation  
while riding on a wood and wire horse.  
Fourteenth century paintings and chants  
only accentuate Pre-Raphaelite hair  
because only a true Victorian  
has the mental stamina to wiggle inside  
with conflict over Buddha, Rodin,  
and the Boxer Rebellion.  
My Mahapurusha,  
you are the artist watching art.  
I know because I saw your head tilt just so  
when you saw a Chinese child used as a plow.

To recapture the lost portrait,  
Of serenading Guitars  
And duplicated poems.

A time  
A way of life  
An era.

Not when the crony vibe is a sexual caress  
With animal instincts, a dog in heat, 21st century at its best.

But to sneak on the cheek a kiss  
With chaperon in the midst.

To whisper mildness  
As she listens through *la reja*.

To recapture the portrait,  
Of a time  
A way of life  
An era.

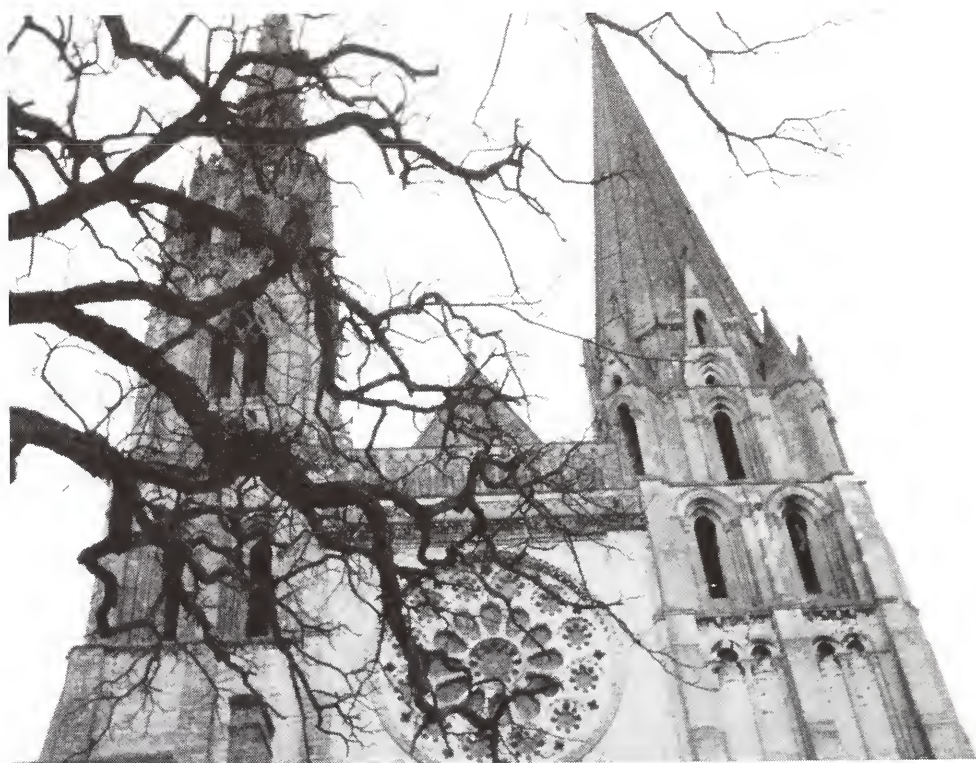
A thousand streets, we're lost inside each other.  
A home within the glitter there  
Suits in rain, they run for cover  
Sweaters soaked, don't even care

Theatre nights on Tuesdays now  
Davinci's soon at three  
Your dress last night, the cat's meow  
Parade, just you and me

This one's for you, I learned at Pratt  
Through Fashion 101  
I guess you're changed this one-time brat  
We both know I'm not done

Wear that shirt; be there at two  
Don't worry about your hair  
Davinci hates to serve cold food  
Reheat perch? Unheard of there







The pink upturn waltzing around the rim of your lips  
is more intoxicating than gold suspended in a glass,  
more seductive than channel 99 after midnight.  
Is there anything more sublime than you, just being yourself

Compound conditions leave me.  
I am too simple for complication,  
Too complicated for simplicity.  
I am afraid to show myself in actuality;  
I am blind to the obvious and certain of death,  
Lost in oblivion and wounded in love,  
Remembering pain and forgetting life,  
Assuming too much and neglecting too little,  
Taking the world for granted in a snow globe of water,  
Without oxygen and drowning in tears.

Bound to own  
the most fall-short plans  
that could be thought  
would ever come true,  
and if I never find my way  
I'd be more than lost without you  
cos you're my compass  
and my north star.  
One glance from your eyes,  
flashing an oasis of  
grace no longer mirage,  
guides me homeward  
over superstitious travel  
on arid roads left marked  
by blessed talismans.

While a groggy night watch  
sounds four at two  
past one forty-five,  
I stand puzzled,  
shaken, and  
staring out the windowless  
birdhouse to my soul  
where I've been set on the shelf,  
gently courting lonely  
like a bag of groceries  
past my expiration date.

Giants in the land scare me  
from promises surely mine  
that quickly try to be forgotten  
amid a horde of  
swaying-under-strong-drink beauties  
of whom manipulation would be quick.  
I'd have jumped at the chance

some time ago but  
something holds me back now--  
maybe nothing more than aversion  
at having to deal with the guilt,  
or maybe I don't have an interest  
in just that-kind-of-thing.  
I wish I could believe that  
when I don't dare admit  
Your quiet and oh-so-gentle  
arguments bring me to my knees.

You see that I want to believe  
the smoke surrounding my  
all-is-too-clear vantage point  
is (*si je parle en verlan*)  
garic, flint, and steel  
(gentle cherry-flavored  
companion to late-night musing  
that kills taste buds craving  
smooth soft supple sweets  
topped with creamy  
fluffy flavor)  
but . . .

'Not until the time comes'  
says the whisper-so-soft voice  
and . . .

Young waitress hurried here  
and there's another task undone:  
one more requires filling,  
another spot cries out for cleaning.  
Oh, to see her joys,  
to know that she wants most,  
to forget all selfish ploys,

to rid myself of boasts.  
But I don't know if I could  
cos I might fumble the play  
and stop short of the goal.

But if I don't look  
beyond myself in this place  
at least once in a long selfish while,  
I run the risk of being the last man,  
rather than going under  
and becoming overman.  
Come break me.

The greasy cook puffs  
like he's James Dean,  
flicks an ash like Brigitte Bardot,  
and directs my oft-distracted attention  
once again to the existentialism  
of Jean Pawl Sateery.  
I instinctively correct his French-  
'*C'est Jean-Paul Sartre*'  
in my best *parisienne*,  
and he stares blankly,  
obviously wondering  
who gave me authority,  
and I wonder if, perhaps,  
that wasn't some clever  
Cleveland attempt  
at deconstruction.  
Try this.

The lights burn copper, and I alone  
On the rain-slicked Carlisle cobblestone . . .

The gates of the cathedral, barred and blocked  
In chains held tight with a rusty Chubb lock.  
The Boardroom quiet, as club should be,  
Without this hellish clash called karaoke.  
(No one's ever quite out-done Pope,  
But then there's always arrogance and hope . . .)  
The cold rain for the vain who feel the chill,  
But I'd not noticed that the wind could kill.  
The Crown and Mitre sits, sandstone and gilt,  
With all the night's knives honed to the hilt.  
Just thirty more minutes 'till the pubs throw down,  
And sully the streets of this rain-damp town  
The clock tower sits like a clerical collar,  
Banding the night  
Like a single silver dollar  
Underneath a lithium flashlight.  
A leather-clad couple walks in an umbrellad huddle, dripping  
Like the drops slipping into a side street puddle,  
Glimmering and glinting in the streets of Carlisle,  
With all the confusion of beer and belial.

. . . the drunks are all dressed, and I'll look tacky  
In my black t-shirt and my water-spotted khakis . . .

(from the ped mall at midnight)

At the time of this writing I like the night better than the  
day  
and I don't know why  
I'm not one of those odd gothic types  
gripping about the evils of illumination in general  
perhaps it's the solitude I enjoy  
Growing up there was this beautiful bike trail near my house  
someone once told me it was one of the 10 most beautiful in  
the country  
I always fancied that one day I would go out and no one  
would be there  
I didn't wish spontaneous incineration on them or anything  
like that  
just that as a collective the individuals who frequented the  
trail would have decided  
not to go out  
sure the trail would be the *same* in all of the obvious ways,  
but there would be one important difference  
for the few moments I was on the trail in complete isolation  
it would essentially be  
Mine  
I realize this is a peculiar stance for a rabid extravert to take  
and I am a rabid extravert  
one of my best friends once told me  
I needed other people more than anyone else she knew  
but I cannot help that solitude is my wish  
so perhaps that is why I prefer the night  
but even the night is not truly a time of solitude  
for instance five minutes ago  
a rather strange looking boy with dreadlocks and a beard  
walked passed me  
he had a camcorder and was taping the ground as he walked  
I don't know, I don't *know*



its like that during the day you have to *talk* to people  
but that's not the case, for I really love talking  
the problem is in the *listening*  
but then look at me  
expecting you to *listen* to my inane ramblings  
italicizing everything like my last name is Caulfield  
who's the phony now

I wish I was a better man  
Maybe I could live in a garbage can  
for twelve years -- come out with a long beard  
reciting poetry or songs  
like I was a prophet or vagabond

Maybe I could play an instrument  
Ol' harp maybe  
Play alotta d flats and f sharps  
Sing rhyming words to a soft tune  
Under a flat sun or pale moon

Maybe I could open a new door  
to something nobody's seen before  
I'd invite them in  
like we were old friends  
offer them a cup of coffee or cold tea  
then they'd sit next to me  
we'd read history books  
and decide which were right

Maybe I'll drawl me a box  
to the center of Times Square  
then I'll stand there  
I won't mutter a word or phrase  
for days  
I won't drink or eat  
I'll just stand there as me  
for all the world to see

Then I'll awake from my sleep  
Spring to my feet  
Shoutin' words and proclamations  
to all the worlds and nations

Cause silence speaks louder than 1,000 words  
And flies higher than the highest birds

I'll remember peace is a forgotten word  
And every 20 years it seems absurd  
But there's blood and war on every corner  
And on every street  
And every land gets trodden by flattened feet  
That no two men think alike  
This is the struggle, this is the fight  
This is the battleground on which we run  
And the thought of mind that pulls the gun

And I'll tell them  
And they'll turn from sin--begin again  
Like Adam, Eve, and an orchard tree  
And we'll all be free  
And people like me  
Won't have to write stupid poems  
Like this



Twas late in summer of the year,  
when all men stop to have some cheer  
and hasten to a county fair  
to see the wonders waiting there.

Twas there I happened on a sign  
to catch the eye and it caught mine.  
It spoke of one of great renown.  
It read: "Sibyl has come to town,  
a lady of the Ancient Greeks,  
she's not one of our circus freaks  
but truly genuine you'll see.  
Five bucks will be the only fee  
for her to tell your fortune quick  
although the truth may make you sick."

I made the choice right then and there  
to see the Sibyl at the fair,  
for I have heard of that great lass  
so many times in World Lit. class.

The Sibyl's one of legend old  
who men sought for their fortune told.  
There's one in Delphi, Cumae too.  
I guessed it was the Cumae's due  
the honor of so much high praise  
of banners at the circus ways.  
Though there be Sibyls, ten in all,  
Cumae's the fairest of them all.

I hastened to her chamber door.  
It was a tent with a straw floor,  
not one of those cool caves beside  
a stream, which legend has belied.

I entered in and there she sat,  
The Cumae Sibyl on a mat,  
seated before a crystal ball  
bright curtains hung from wall to wall.  
She asked, "Who is that standing there?"  
She called, "You sir, why do you stare?  
Come sit and I will read the past  
To tell how all will end at last."

I sat before her mighty stare,  
her gleaming eyes, her frizzy hair.  
She whispered, "Well, what will it be,  
to tell your fortune as I see?"

I gazed at her with reverence.  
My spirit quailed in her presence:  
"Dear Madam, I have traveled here  
because I heard you were a seer  
and not just any fortune-teller  
but one of those blessed by Apollo.  
You have great sisters far and wide  
but they live on the other side  
of Atlantis' sweeping Ocean  
and the earth's revolving motion.  
Tis true your sisters live too far  
for me to travel to where they are.  
So humbly I come to thee  
to hear what you would say to me.  
Oh lady, Oh thou prophetess,  
you are my muse, I must confess.  
I long to hear your faithful word  
concerning me. May I assert,  
I know you are of great renown;  
your praise is posted through the town.  
You foretold of the Trojan's war  
that left upon poor Greece a scar  
because their dearest maiden left

with Troy's proud prince. She liked the cleft  
of his firm chin against her own.  
The beauty of the maiden shone  
for all to see. That was her prize  
to win the lust of all men's eyes.  
You led Aeneas through the land  
where dead men walk at every hand.  
You led him to his father dear;  
you waited while he shed a tear  
and then you led him safely home.  
Wise he became, in stature grown.  
So see, you've done great things, I know,  
At least that's how the story goes.  
Your beauty's gone but truth remains.  
You prophesy in sweet refrains.  
Sing to me what song you must,  
but don't delay or I will bust."

"Tis true," she said, "I am the one  
most gifted by the god of sun  
to sing the prophecies of old.  
Five dollars and your cares are told.  
But I'll warn you of this game;  
our world views may not be the same.  
There may be troubles to reveal  
which you would rather leave concealed.  
But I'll hold nothing back my friend,  
though future be a bitter end.  
Tis not my style to cheat you of  
your destiny designed above.  
So five bucks here, now let's begin  
I see you plain, you're caught within  
the silly sisters' weaving thread.  
You see, I think they want you dead,  
but don't be scared, death comes to all.  
The earth will end and Rome will fall.  
The type of death you'll want to know.



Oh wait, I think we should move slow.  
Let's not speak of your death to be,  
There's other woe to hear and see."

Here she paused and threw back her head.  
Her face went cold, a look of dread  
appeared within her downcast eyes,  
her voice sputtered with sobs and sighs.

"I see you in the prime of life  
with nine fat children and a wife  
who won't deodorize her feet  
that smell of raw and stinking meat.  
Your children are lazy and droll.  
Your wife looks like a healthy troll.  
You'll have to buy a great big house  
just to retain your great big spouse.  
Yes, things aren't looking up for you;  
you'll end up sad, depressed, and blue  
unless you run away right now,  
you'll have to marry some old cow.  
So run away and please be fast.  
Your happiness will surely pass.  
And never trust a woman's love  
though she may seem a pure sweet dove  
for she will ripen to a crow.  
So pack your things and swiftly go  
Join in communion with your friends  
before you meet your bitter ends."

Needless to say, I didn't stay  
to hear how life would pass away  
but swiftly gathered all my things,  
thanked the Sibyl and kissed her rings.

"I'll never love, I never will,"  
Was my resolve to stay until

one day I came upon a girl  
with lips of red and cheeks of pearl.  
I thought, "Well all she says is wrong  
I cannot trust the Sibyl's song.  
Instead, I'll bind myself to mate.  
Thank God I don't believe in fate."

That's all the tale that came to pass  
And time will tell if joy can last.  
Yet, Cumae's Sibyl seems to me  
a profaner of pure prophecy.

up.  
paint, plaster, wood, steel  
hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, ozone  
noxious gas and smog  
troposphere  
mesosphere  
a bunch of other atmosphere spheres  
exosphere  
getting kinda cold up here  
space  
suns planets stars comets asteroids  
AND NO ONE TO TALK TO!

down.  
legs, shoes, concrete, dust  
maybe some animals  
upper crust, lower crust  
outer mantle, other mantles  
getting really hot  
rocks are melting, screeching  
turning red  
no fire 'cuz there's no oxygen  
but lots of heat  
and not a soul in sight.

West.  
Tennessee . . . and more Tennessee . . .  
The teeth-to-people ratio getting  
really quite  
Staggering  
Southwestern swelter  
California --  
More people, more teeth, more  
silicone  
And a whole lot more smog.

Santa Monica beach  
Littered with trash and dirty  
hypodermics  
Pacific  
Water, water, and more water  
Sharks, whales  
And sexy dark-haired Polynesian  
natives  
Asia  
Vietnam  
Hats that look like plates and lots of  
leftover destruction. God bless the  
USA  
India  
Beautiful people starving everywhere  
The Middle East  
A small percentage of them terrorists  
And the rest of them just terrified  
(God bless America)  
A swarm of rude Europeans  
Who are probably sick of the swarm  
of rude Americans  
More ocean  
Waves, hurricanes, the perfect storm  
Sandy beach  
Eight long hours  
Mountains  
Same old toothless neighbors  
Cleveland  
Conn Center  
Balcony  
People all over the place  
But no soul anywhere .

East.

Read up.

"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right." 1 Sam. 12:23 NIV

"Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found. . . . I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." Ps. 32:6a, 8 NIV

"We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Rom. 8:26b NIV

"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'" Luke 11:1 NIV

John Wesley called prayer "the means by which God governs the world." When I first heard that two thoughts occurred to me. The first was, "Wow! What a cool thing to say!" The second was, "Wow! What a terribly inefficient way of governing the world!" I think that this second thought is a symptom of our tendency to see prayer as a kind of espionage conducted against the Eternal. The problem is that the kind of intelligence it brings back is often hard to decrypt, sometimes seems practically useless, and is almost never exactly what we expect.

But we can turn this around, as the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer does: "Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words." The idea of response suggests that we are completing an action that God has already started. He is at hand; we don't have to slip through customs at the border of God like spies--we are

following his orders, carrying his authority, and prayer becomes a way of practicing his presence. Being delegated divine--well, power, frankly--is and should be staggering. As C. S. Lewis says in the play *Shadowlands*, "Prayer doesn't change God; it changes me." Of course, this doesn't mean that God doesn't care about our prayers, but it may be wise to consider what we are in fact doing when we pray. In the Samuel and Psalms passages, I don't think the speaker is specifically talking about teaching his audience the proper way of praying, but of living; however, the fact that the two concepts follow each other in this way should tell us something about how closely they are related. Something about the Great Commission, about being a royal priesthood, about being the body of Christ comes to mind, and suddenly John Wesley's statement doesn't seem so glib.

Regardless of whatever else we think about prayer, though, it is certainly deeply mysterious. There are no magic words and no magic ways of saying words to guarantee "getting what we want." Sometimes we pray for things in complete faith and in Christ's name, having plausible reasons for assuming them to be in accordance with the Father's will, and we are simply told "no." On the other hand, I believe that Tennyson was correct in writing, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." It is easy to notice when God chooses not to grant our prayers. It is not always so easy, when something good happens or something bad fails to happen, to remember that it may be the result of someone praying for us.

Within the Greek word *proseukomai*, I pray, are *pros* (to, as in, motion toward), *eu* (good), and the deponent verb ending *omai*, which indicates action, so while the word literally means "I pray," it connotes a phrase like "I act toward [something] good." The idea is powerful, if vague, but

Jesus, understanding how dangerous we can be with powerful, vague things, gave us a little direction with a model prayer. I refer again to the Book of Common Prayer:

The principal kinds of prayer are adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, and petition. Adoration is the lifting up of the heart and mind to God, asking nothing but to enjoy God's presence. We praise God, not to obtain anything, but because God's Being draws praise from us. Thanksgiving is offered to God for all the blessings of this life, for our redemption, and for whatever draws us closer to God. In penitence, we confess our sins and make restitution where possible, with the intention to amend our lives. Oblation is an offering of ourselves, our lives and labors, in union with Christ, for the purposes of God. Intercession brings before God the needs of others; in petition, we present our own needs, that God's will may be done.

Some kinds are more obvious in the model prayer than others, but if we pay attention, we can see all seven.

As we have all been told and as we all often forget, the act of addressing God as Abba, Daddy, is an extremely bold thing to do. It is itself adoration: addressing him in the familiar, assuming we have the right to be in his presence (let us remember that strolling nonchalantly into the Holy of Holies used to be a good way of getting stricken dead!). If we have any sense about us, we would do well to do this with a spirit of gratitude, which I think is rather implicit in some of the phrases of the prayer. Praise and penitence are obviously there, and "our daily bread" means whatever needs we might petition God for, which he understands better than we can express, though I think that actually forming the words is important for us, if not for him. By saying "may your will be done" and "as we forgive others,"



we are acknowledging our subservience and duty to God. (I have also heard that the phrase "give us our daily bread" reflects the practice, in the Roman army, of asking in the morning for a day's rations, and thereby obligating oneself to service--I don't know how accurate that information is, but Jesus' disciples, steeped in Covenant tradition, probably still would have understood their requests of God in this way.) If the model prayer does not seem particularly intercessory, it is because we sometimes forget to pay attention to the words we're using: a sense of community is assumed--the word "I" never appears. It also seems significant that, before any petitions come up in this prayer, we put the Father's will and the coming of his kingdom first, as if to say, "Alright, Dad, I'm going to ask you for something, but keep my ignorance in mind as you consider it. Please don't give me something that's going to hurt me or your greater plan in some way." For example, I hope to be able to kneel to pray again someday, but for now, quadriplegia provides me with more opportunities to be humble than I would really like, and I dare not ask God to help me become more humble, lest he consent. (And yet to say that I don't want to be made more humble reminds me with a pang how much I need it.)

Some parts of the old King James "Our Father" do not appear in newer translations because of manuscript discrepancies. For example, we now know that the part at the end, "For the kingdom and power and glory are yours, forever and ever," comes from an early church manual called the *Didache*, and somehow got grafted onto the copies that were used for the King James (Authorized) Version. This brings to mind another change that many new translations make, though the NIV does not. It used to strike me as strange that Jesus would have us ask the Father not to lead us into temptation. Why would the Father even want to do such a thing? The very idea seems to fly in the face of James 1:13, "For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt

anyone" (NIV). In the pattern of the Psalms, most or all of which are some kind of prayer, this line is tied to one that complements it, "but deliver us from evil [or, the evil one]." Surely God knows that leading us into temptation is not a very good way of delivering us from evil, and surely Jesus is not just being ironic by suggesting that we inform him of the fact. Actually, the Greek *peirasmós* is better translated trial (i.e., trying circumstances). Hence, new versions often read "Save us from the time of trial" or "Do not put us to the test." In the midst of both our petitions and our oblations, we ask simply, "Please don't let us face more evil and hardship than we can overcome." This very bold prayer ends with an acknowledgment of our own frailty and dependence on God. I have deliberately referred to this as "the model prayer" rather than as "the Lord's prayer" because it is the prayer that Jesus gave to us--"the Lord's prayer" is probably more appropriately the one he prayed in Gethsemane. How much we and the world might be changed if we were given the awful grace to pray as he prayed then. . . .

It is worth asking what exactly Jesus meant us to do with the prayer he prescribed: is it just an example of the way we should pray, or did he compose it to be recited by rote in liturgical fashion? Well, first, we should remember that Jews and the early church regularly prayed certain liturgical prayers, both in group settings and in private, so it is no good suggesting that liturgy is a bad way of communicating with God. On the other hand, they also prayed spontaneously, and Jesus told his disciples, "Pray this way," not "Always and only say these words." The purpose and advantage of using a familiar set of words or formula is that it allows us to concentrate on the One being prayed to rather than on the act of praying, and of course the ironic danger of it--which is also the danger of using the same praise choruses in church all the time--is that we'll end up just uttering the words without focusing our minds and hearts on him. Either way, self-discipline is imperative; a wooden,

self-imposed rule of exclusively liturgical or spontaneous prayer is a course plotted between Scylla and Charybdis, a choice of the frying pan or the fire.

Prayer can be such a sublime experience. Why cheat ourselves of any opportunity to express ourselves to God, or to let him express himself to us? For that matter, why do we tend to use the terms "worship" and "music" synonymously? Why not use any means (within reason, of course) that our God-given creativity can devise? What about observing silence? More dramatic sketches? Even dancing? I used to snicker or scoff at people waving banners during a worship service, but now I wonder why I could not simply acknowledge that was that person's way of worshiping and then go on focusing my attention on God in my own way. Of course, this opens the floor for debate about not distracting our brothers and sisters (though I doubt a banner is much more distracting than a person singing badly off-key), and about not turning a worship service into a mere showcase of our talents or emotions, but I think it is a debate worth having, an issue worthy of an open mind. May we never tire of talking about our Lord; more importantly, may we never tire of talking to him; most importantly, may we never tire of listening for his still, small voice, especially when it speaks in the mouth of the poor asking for help or the lost crying for hope.

I would recommend, at any rate, that we in Pentecostal/Charismatic congregations devote more time in our services to praying, especially for the needs of the world outside. "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7). I rather doubt we will please the Lord by being, as the old saying goes, too heavenly-minded to do any earthly good, or by focusing on our own spiritual needs to the exclusion of those of others, both spiritual and temporal. To use the words of the medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, "If you are in rapture in the seventh heaven and hear of an old lady who is hungry, descend from

your mystical experience and bring this child of God a bowl of soup." Remember God's funny way of governing the world, our chance to practice his presence in a gloriously simple way. Praying for others is perhaps the best way to distract ourselves from our selves, which should be the very idea behind the word "service"--putting someone else first. That distraction is one all of us can hope to commit. It seems fitting that a sermon on prayer should end with a prayer, and that is mine: Father, distract us into you, and into those to whom we must show your love. In Christ's name, Amen.





Hydrogen bonding is FON  
as is learned in every beauty salon--  
Molecules of water coursing  
                        racing  
through broken strands of protein  
large mammalian hands  
                        caressing  
dried squamous epithelia  
                        stimulating  
nerves across the action potential  
an electric thrill soaring  
                        speeding  
from neuron to neuron  
opposable thumbs  
gently persuading  
                        myosin and tropomyosin  
to stay locked into place  
                        leaving the sarcomere to stretch  
                                        to reach  
                                        to rest  
bases added to protein strands  
                        white foam catching oxygen in  
                        repetitious infinite pattern  
the universal solvent neutralizing  
                        sweeping

OH<sup>-</sup>s down and away  
                        the dead cells free of grime  
                                        &  
                                        lipids

Now immersed in cholesterol and more proteins  
and vitamin E  
set to soak that the dead cells may look  
revitalized

rinsed away that the  
dead cells may benefit from the now empty sacs squirted  
from the bottle--  
head gently resting  
as if the hands of momma and grandma and all those before  
did lather and lubricate

did lather and lubricate  
my scalp  
my scalp in the simple  
quiet song  
of when I was  
younger



A nameless river flows, an opaque colloid  
Of dust suspended among reeking algae.  
Rust-colored cracked clay gapes angrily  
Across its banks' sullen Sahara void.  
A branching bridge, an artificial umbilical cord,  
Connects an outdated factory to an ingrown community.  
Steel framework looms over water arrogantly.  
As if height were all it needs to be called lord.  
Downstream, a church, pews mucus green as the river,  
Holds empty seats and a vacant baptistery.  
The baptismal is broken, tile mildewed and decayed,  
The pulpit's wood cracked and the crucifix on the floor.  
Above the church, a spindly metal steeple reaches  
To heaven, unaware of the fallen decades.

They say to write the first draft with your heart.  
I guess you're supposed to grip it kind of like a pencil.  
I never quite got a handle on that concept,  
Although you did your best to show me.  
Your twisted, left-handed style has left me feeling used.  
I can't hope to have affected you in the least,  
You were calloused long before you found me.  
I am a red pen running low on ink.  
You used me for nothing constructive.  
My heart is drained,  
This ode to you is penned in bitter bile.

Go uptown to four bedrooms, in-ground pool  
That Kenny G took you to via Land  
of Rover (maybe Beemer). Ski on cool  
days. DVD, surround sound, Covey planned  
life--cause you highly 'fective. Dunkin' cup  
in holder. Downtown homeless stand around.  
Bored kids on bikes buy Donuts, midnight stop,  
Whenever. Twenty-four choice hours. Profound  
discussions of TV, and who busted now  
leaves white trash lingering on sidewalks. Whiz  
south corporates suck hazelnuts, hunched low  
gray cubicles and meeting rooms. Life is  
good. Nother drive-thru, 'nother cup of steam,  
iced, French vanilla, decaf, Irish Cream . . .

I went for a walk today.  
A walk, not a gander or frolic.  
A walk, not a gay romp across the grass.  
A walk. And it was winter, not spring.

The road was suburban pavement.  
The birds were migrated or dead.  
The scampering creatures were mangy stray dogs,  
And the mountains, prefabricated houses.

I was alone, for my love hates me.  
And he also hates the cold.  
The tree's scraggly limbs and sky's pale face  
Remind him too much of his own.

He is the perpetual romantic.  
He throws the book at me.  
Dime store romances about lovers and liars,  
and two-thirds of it a sex scene.

I am not the star of his private soap opera.  
Except maybe the untamable shrew.  
He harps about harps and nags about nuggets  
and never lets me be.

I go for a walk very often.  
In suburbia, the country's last pasture.  
Though he may want wool and lamb when I get back--  
Who cares. *I'm* not a sheep.



